DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 103 CG 016 797

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TITLE Building a Data Based Model for Senior Adult Basic Education.
INSTITUTION Georgia Univ., Athens. Center for Continuing Education.
SPONS AGENCY Georgia State Dept. of Education, Atlanta. Office of Adult and Vocational Education.
PUB DATE Nov 82
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (35th, Boston, MA, November 19-23, 1982).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Adult Basic Education; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Research; *Educational Needs; Educational Planning; *Enrollment Influences; *Older Adults; Participation; Relevance (Education); Student Educational Objectives

ABSTRACT

Research shows that developing a curriculum model for senior adult education requires consideration of at least four important factors: (1) the heterogeneous nature of the senior adult population; (2) their specific information and interest needs; (3) the specific nature of the learning activities; and (4) the specific barriers and facilitators pertinent to this population. In order to respond to these considerations with a databased curriculum, adults (N=505), aged 60 and over (432 of these were participants in AoA funded nutrition sites in Georgia), responded to an 85-item interviewer-administered questionnaire assessing their educational needs and interests in the areas of health, social services, economics, social and cultural activities, government and law, and personal development. Results showed that a dislike of being out at night was the top ranked barrier to enrolling in adult basic education. The information from the survey was used to develop a teacher's instructional manual based on the top ranked topics, which includes resource and reference information, and add-on units for the more advanced learner. This databased curriculum development model can be useful for others constructing a senior adult basic education curriculum. (Tables detailing the study results, and the table of contents for the teacher's manual are included.) (MCF)

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BUILDING A DATA BASED MODEL FOR SENIOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

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CG 016797

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BUILDING A DATA BASED MODEL

FOR SENIOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

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There is an agreed upon need in the field of educational gerontology for empirically based research designed to generate and test theoretical paradigms for what Peterson (1980) has called senior adult education (Boshier, 1976; Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979; Heisel et al, 1981). While descriptive studies of participation in adult and continuing education are available (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1975; Peterson, 1981), there is a continuing need for data based models which can assist in explaining and predicting participation in adult education by the older adult, particularly the socioeconomically disadvantaged. An important step in the process involves the development of adult education programs based upon: 1) the characteristics of older population groups; 2) the learning needs and interests of older adults; and 3) empirical information on the barriers and facilitators to participation in senior adult education programs.

The investigation was funded in part by a grant from the Adult Education Unit, Georgia Department of Education.

Older Adults as Learners

One frequently held misconception about older adults is that they comprise a homogeneous population. Often little or no distinction is made for individual differences or for variations between age cohorts. Heisel and his associates, in analyzing National Center for Educational Statistics data from the 1975 survey, found a significant variance in participation of older adults in different types of courses by age categories (60-64; 65-69; 70+). Eighty percent of the 60-64 age group took courses in technical and vocational subjects as compared with 2.2% of the 70 and over age group. Of the 12 specific types of courses reported, five showed a difference of 50 percent or more between these two age groups.

Other studies have indicated the complex and intricate stratification which exists among the aged. Maddox (1979) has emphasized the need to view the elderly as being very heterogeneous in socially significant characteristics. And as Hickey (1980, p. 84) points out "from the numerous studies that have documented the wide degree of heterogeneity among the elderly, one may assume that perceptions of social context range considerably among the elderly" (Bengston, Kasschau, and Ragan, 1977; Kalish, 1975; Neugarten and Moore, 1968). As a corollary to this, one would expect the perceptions of educational needs among older adults would be equally as varied.

The Educational Needs of Older Adults

The effect of aging on the need for education is yet not well understood. Few studies are available on the expressed learning interests and needs of older adults. McCluskey (n.d.) has categorized

the learning needs of the aging as the need to cope, to express oneself, to contribute, to have an influence, and to transcend. Havighurst (1980) proposes three basic classes: the needs for survival, self-esteem, and transcendence. Havighurst (1963) has also identified two basic aspects of education, instrumental and expressive. Adult educators have tried to design and offer learning experiences satisfying these categories of need, but their success is debatable (Marcus and Havighurst, 1980).

Barriers to Participation

Some of the barriers to participation in adult education have been identified. Hiemstra found that dislike of going out at night was indicated by almost one-half of the older adults (1975). Peterson (1981, p. 25) points out that "people are likely to attend courses only in an institution that they have previously visited and thus view as accessible." He also suggests that availability of social interaction, the need for some particular information or interest in learning about a topic, and social support and encouragement that results from membership in a sponsoring organization facilitate participation in an educational program.

Targeting Senior Adult Basic Education Programs

As discussed above, an adult education program structured around the learning interests and needs of a homogeneous population and located in an accessible, familiar location would tend to increase participation in the programs. Participants in the AoA funded nutrition sites established throughout the United States present a

possible target for adult basic education programs (Heisel, 1980). The participants have similar socioeconomic backgrounds and interests. The factors Peterson cites as "pushers" are present: familiarity with the setting, availability of social interaction, social support and encouragement, and similar needs for information.

Before proceeding to the data based component of the model, a summary of the foregoing discussion indicates that at least four factors need to be taken into account when developing a curriculum model for senior adult education:

1. The heterogeneous nature of the senior adult population makes it difficult to program educational activities of the entire group. By narrowing the focus, it may be possible to reduce this problem.

2. The specific information and interest needs of the target group must be assessed.

3. Expressive learning activities may be more appropriate as age increases. However, the instrumental needs of this population cannot be ignored.

4. The specific barriers and facilitators pertinent to this population must be taken into account.

Building a Data Based Curriculum for Senior Adult Basic Education

The data for study comes from a survey of 505 older adults (60+), 432 of whom participate in AoA funded nutrition sites across the State of Georgia. The characteristics of the participants indicate a fairly homogeneous group.

The interviews were held in nutrition sites located in each of Georgia's 18 regional area planning and development commissions (APDC's). The sample of older adults interviewed was based on the state's total older adult population by sex and race.

The sample was composed of 63% females, 37% males; 63% white, 37% non-white; 27% married, 53% widowed, and 19% divorced or never married. The median age was 72.5 years. The median educational level was seven years.

The target population was asked to respond to an 85-item interviewer-administered survey instrument designed to assess their educational interests and needs in six major areas (the needs and interests were based on Compton and McClusky's Community Education for Development topics, 1980): 1) health, 2) social services, 3) economics, 4) social and cultural activities, 5) government and law, and 6) personal development. Their responses to a four-point Likert scale were grouped into "Interested" (very interested and somewhat interested) and "Not Interested" (definitely not interested and probably not interested). Tables 2 and 3 present the rank order of subject areas as selected by the respondents.

Specific topics were developed within each subject area, and the respondents were also asked to rank the topics according to their degree of interest. Tables 2 and 3 present the rank order of each topic.

The top ranked barrier to enrolling in adult basic education was, as Hiemstra (1975) reported, the dislike of being out at night. Other barriers reported were: transportation problems, inconvenient location, inconvenient time, and poor vision (Table 4).

A teacher's instructional manual (Table 5) for adult basic education was developed based upon the top ranked topics (modules). The modules were categorized according to the major subject area (units). The educational level of the content was directed to learners with

four to seven years of formal education. The manual includes both expressive and instrumental learning topics and activities. Resource and reference information for further study is also included. Part I of the manual provides the instructor with information and strategies for working with the older learner.

The manual also contains (Part III) add-on units on the biology, sociology, and psychology of aging for the more advanced learner (Courtenay, Sokol, and Suhart, 1979).

Conclusion

This project has used data based information from a target population in the construction of a senior adult basic education curriculum. The subject matter included is based solely on the data presented herein. Although included in the choice of topics, basic skills and knowledge required for functional living according to the Adult Performance Level Project (1977), for example, were not included if they were ranked low by the respondents. It should also be noted that the present study does not include subject content by age distribution.

It is hoped that this curriculum development model has provided insight into how data based information may be used in building senior adult basic education programs in the future. The implications of this study may assist other adult educators in planning and developing senior adult education programs for their target populations.

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TABLE I

Descriptive Statistics of the Interview Sample of Older Adults, Senior Center Participants, ABE Students over 60 years of age, and the State Population of 60 Years Old

Characteristic	Interview Sample of Older Adults N = 505	Senior Center Participants as Reported by Managers N = 95	Older Students as Reported by ABE Coordinators N = 46	State Population of Older Adults
AGE	Mean Age = 72.5 years 60 - 69 = 32.5% 70 - 79 = 44.9% 80 & over = 20.4%	Not Reported	ABE Students over 60 years = 6.1%	60 - 69 = 56.3%* 70 - 79 = 31.9% 80 & over = 11.8% State Population over 60 years = 13.6%
SEX	Female = 62.6% Male = 37.4%	Female = 73.2% Male = 23.9% Not Reported = 3.0%	Female = 78.4% Male = 20.6% Not Reported = 1.0%	Female = 59.1%* Male = 40.9%
RACE	White = 62.6% Non-White = 37.4%	White = 63.7% Non-White = 36.3%	White =45.7%(17.3)+ Non-White =43.0%(16.3) Not Reported=11.3%(66.4)	White = 74.5%* Non-White = 25.5%
MARITAL STATUS	Married = 27.4% Widowed = 52.8% Other Single = 18.8%	Married = 19.8% Not Married = 58.9% Not Reported = 21.3%	Married =20.9(7.9%)+ Not Married =45.1(17.0%) Not Reported=34.0(75.1%)	Married = 45.3%** Widowed = 42.0% Other Single = 12.7%
INCOME	Above Poverty Level = 18.5% Below Poverty Level = 58.9% Not Reported = 22.6%	Above Poverty Level = 28.8% Below Poverty Level = 57.6% Not Reported = 13.6%	Above Poverty Level =13.1%(4.9)+ Below Poverty Level =39.8%(16.0) Not Reported=47.1%(79.1)	Above Poverty Level = 60.4%** Below Poverty Level =39.6%
SCHOOLING	Median Years = 7.0 0 - 4 years = 26.0% 0 - 8 years = 68.9%	Estimate of those who read or write at a 0 - 4 level = 19.2% Not Reported = 23.3%	Level I (0-8) = 91.4% Level II (9-12)= 5.0%	Median Years = 7.7%** 0 - 8 = 58.0%

	Older Adults	Participants	ABE Students	State Population
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Not Asked	Employed = 4.4% Unemployed Available = 4.2% Not Available = 67.6% Not Reported = 23.8%	Employed =10.6(4.0%)+ Unemployed: Available =20.9(7.9%) Not Available=54.5(20.5%) Not Reported =14.0(67.6%)	Employed or Unemployed Available = 16.7%**
RESIDENCE	Not Determined (All interviews took place at locations of over 2,500 people)	Urban = 51.3% Rural = 39.9% Not Reported = 8.8%	Urban = 76.6% Rural = 21.3% Not Reported = 2.1%	Urban = 58.3%** Rural = 41.7%
DISABILITIES	Would your health prevent you from attending a class? Yes = 12.2% Sometimes = 17.3% No = 60.1% Not Reported = 10.4%	Not Asked	Handicapped =12.2(4.6%)+ Not Reported= 8.2(66.9%)	No limitation of mobility = 82.4%**
IMMIGRANTS	None	Not Asked	Immigrants = 1.4(0.5%) Not Reported= 8.2(66.9%)	
INSTITUTIONALIZED	Incarcerated = 5.6% Nursing Home = 4.8% Other = 0	None	Incarcerated= 3.4(1.3%) Nursing Home=24.6(9.1%) Other = 1.4(0.5%) Not Reported= 8.2(66.0%)	Incarcerated = 150**** persons Nursing Home = 4.8%***

* 1980 Projection, Georgia Office of Planning and Budget
** 1970 Census estimate for persons 65 years and older in Georgia
*** 1979 Nursing home census, State Health Planning Development Agency, for persons 65 years and older
**** Georgia Department of Offender Rehabilitation
\+ A large proportion of older ABE students were included in one survey which did not report some information. Figures indicate the percentage excluding these older adults. Figures in parentheses indicate percentages including these adults.

TABLE 2

ABE FOR OLDER ADULTS:
RANKING OF TOPICS FOR ADULT & PROFESSIONAL SAMPLES

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECT AREA
1. Health	1. Health	1. Personal Development
2. Government & Law	2. Social Services	2. Economics
3. Personal Development	3. Economics	3. Health
4. Social Services	4. Government & Law	4. Social Services
5. Economics	5. Personal Development	5. Government & Law
6. Cultural	6. Cultural	6. Cultural
TOPICS	TOPICS	TOPICS
1. HEALTH (M=2.79)	1. HEALTH (M=3.26)	3. HEALTH (M=3.09)
*2. Medicare	3. Medicare	6. Local health services
2. Personal health care	5. Medicaid	7. Medicare
6. Drug-related problems with the older adult	6. Local health services	7. Medicaid
8. Local health services	7. Personal health care	10. Personal health care
9. Nutrition	16. Basic safety measures	16. Nutrition
9. Aging process	18. Nutrition	30. Basic safety measures
11. Movement/Exercise	23. Aging process	32. Aging process
13. Basic safety measures	23. Drug-related problems with the older adult	35. Drug-related problems with the older adult
17. Medicaid	31. Movement/Exercise	43. Movement/Exercise
2. GOVERNMENT & LAW (M=2.61)	4. GOVERNMENT & LAW (M=2.85)	5. GOVERNMENT & LAW (M=2.86)
4. Citizen's rights and duties	11. Citizen's rights and duties	14. Citizen's rights and duties
11. Advocacy	23. Legal documents	23. Legal documents
23. Legal documents	37. Advocacy	36. Government structure
27. Government structure	40. Government structure	39. Advocacy

*The number before each topic indicates the overall ranking of that topic for each sample. When a number is used more than once, it indicates a tie in the average rating. For example, Medicare and Personal Health Care tied for the second highest rated topic by the older sample.

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
3. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (M=2.43)	5. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (M=2.83)	1. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (M=3.32)
1. Ethos	18. Ethos	1. Learning to read
24. Recording life and family history	23. Recording life and family history	1. Learning to write
28. Learning to read	30. Humanities	4. Learning arithmetic
30. Humanities	32. Retirement planning	11. Retirement planning
31. Learning arithmetic	33. Learning to read	20. Ethos
32. Learning to write	34. Learning to write	27. Recording life and family history
35. Retirement planning	35. Learning arithmetic	33. Humanities
4. SOCIAL SERVICES (M=2.39)	2. SOCIAL SERVICES (M=3.21)	4. SOCIAL SERVICES (M=3.07)
7. Senior Centers	2. Transportation services	9. Transportation services
16. Transportation services	8. Legal services	12. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services
18. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	8. Senior Centers	13. Legal services
19. Legal services	10. Housing	15. Senior Centers
26. Mental health services	14. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	18. Housing
33. Housing	27. Mental health services	27. Mental health services
45. Driving	43. Driving	41. Driving
5. ECONOMICS (M=2.26)	3. ECONOMICS (M=2.94)	2. ECONOMICS (M=3.10)
5. Social Security	1. Social Security	3. Social Security
14. Consumer fraud	4. Supplementary Security Income	5. Supplementary Security Income
22. Energy conservation	11. Consumer fraud	16. Comparison shopping
25. Supplementary Security Income	17. Energy conservation	20. Budgeting
34. Comparison shopping	21. Comparison shopping	22. Banking
37. Budgeting	27. Budgeting	24. Consumer fraud
40. Banking	29. Banking	26. Energy conservation
43. Second careers	44. Job applications	34. Job applications
44. Job applications	45. Second careers	37. Second careers

Adults 60 years & over	AAA Managers	ABE Teachers
6. CULTURAL (M=2.01)	6. CULTURAL (M=2.81)	6. CULTURAL (M=2.64)
15. Travel	13. Recreation/Leisure	18. Recreation/Leisure
20. Music	14. Travel	24. Local history
21. Recreation/Leisure	20. Music	29. Library services
29. Local history	22. Local history	31. Travel
36. Library services	35. Library services	38. Music
38. Art	38. Dance	40. Art
39. Poetry	39. Art	42. Drama
41. Drama	41. Poetry	44. Dance
42. Dance	42. Drama	45. Poetry

TABLE 3

ABE FOR OLDER ADULTS:
RANKING OF TOPICS BY YEARS OF SCHOOLING AND BY ABE STUDENTS

More Than Four Years of School	Four or Less Years of School	ABE Students
SUBJECT AREA	**SUBJECT AREA**	**SUBJECT AREA**
1. Health	1. Health	1. Personal Development
2. Government & Law	2. Personal Development	2. Government & Law
3. Social Services	3. Government & Law	2. Health
4. Personal Development	4. Social Services	3. Social Services
5. Economics	5. Economics	4. Cultural
5. Cultural	6. Cultural	5. Economics
TOPICS	**TOPICS**	**TOPICS**
1. Ethos	1. Ethos	1. Ethos
2. Citizen's rights & duties	2. Learn to read	2. Learn to write
3. Medicare	3. Personal health care	3. Learn to read
4. Personal health care	4. Medicare	4. Learn arithmetic
5. Social Security benefits	5. Learn to write	5. Medicare
6. Drug-related problems with the older adult	6. Social Security benefits	6. Personal health care
7. Senior centers	7. Citizen's rights & duties	6. Movement/Exercise
8. Aging process	7. Learn arithmetic	8. Consumer fraud
9. Nutrition	9. Local health services	8. Citizen's rights & duties
9. Movement/Exercise	10. Nutrition	10. Social Security benefits
11. Local health services	11. Drug-related problems with the older adult	11. Transportation services
11. Advocacy	11. Senior centers	12. Medicaid
13. Basic safety measures	13. Medicaid	13. Senior centers
14. Consumer fraud	14. Basic safety measures	13. Supplementary Security Income
15. Travel	15. Advocacy	13. Recording life and family history
16. Transportation services	16. Aging process	16. Basic safety measures
17. Recreation/Leisure	18. Movement/Exercise	17. Nutrition
18. Medicaid	18. Legal services	18. Drug-related problems with the older adult
18. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	18. Supplementary Security Income	

More Than Four Years of School	Four or Less Years of School	ABE Students
0. Legal services	18. Consumer fraud	19. Local health services
0. Music	21. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services	19. Aging process
2. Energy conservation	22. Transportation services	19. Legal services
3. Legal documents	23. Recording life and family history	22. Advocacy
4. Mental health services	24. Travel	23. Travel
4. Recording life and family history	24. Legal documents	24. Library services
6. Government structure	26. Energy conservation	24. Recreation/Leisure
7. Supplementary Security Income	26. Music	26. Homemaker/Home Health Aide services
8. Humanities	28. Mental health services	26. Local history
9. Local history	29. Government structure	28. Music
0. Housing	30. Housing	29. Energy conservation
0. Comparison shopping	31. Recreation/Leisure	30. Government structure
2. Retirement planning	32. Local history	31. Legal documents
3. Library services	33. Comparison shopping	32. Comparison shopping
4. Budgeting	34. Humanities	33. Humanities
4. Poetry	34. Retirement planning	34. Housing
6. Art	36. Library services	34. Banking
7. Learn to read	37. Budgeting	34. Art
7. Learn arithmetic	38. Art	34. Poetry
9. Learn to write	39. Banking	38. Retirement planning
0. Banking	39. Poetry	39. Budgeting
1. Dance	41. Drama	40. Mental health
2. Drama	42. Dance	41. Drama
3. Second careers	43. Second careers	42. Dance
4. Job applications	44. Job applications	43. Job applications
5. Driving	45. Driving	44. Driving
		44. Second careers

Table 4

Perceived Barriers to Enrolling in ABE:
Ranking of Top Five Reasons Reported by Adult and Professional Samples

ADULTS*	AAA MANAGERS	ABE COORDINATORS (Reasons given for dropping a program)	TEACHERS
1. Dislike being out at night	1. Dislike being out at night	1. Transportation problems	1. Transportation problems
2. Transportation problems	2. Transportation problems	2. Health problems	2. Care of other family members
3. Location inconvenient	3. Poor vision	3. Completion of goal	3. Poor vision
4. Time inconvenient	4. Poor hearing	4. Family problems	4. Job responsibilities
5. Poor vision	5. Location inconvenient	4. Changed address or left area	5. Low grades in the past

"Other" Reasons for Not Attending ABE:
Ranked by Frequency of Response

ADULTS 60 and over*	AAA MANAGERS	ABE COORDINATORS	TEACHERS
1. Poor health	1. Lack of motivation ("lack of goals," "content with what they know," etc.)	1. Job responsibilities	1. Poor health
2. Cannot afford to pay for classes	2. Lack of self-esteem ("afraid of failure," "pride," etc.)	2. Class closed or suspended	2. Not aware of opportunities
3. Lack of motivation	3. Inadequate programming (Not aware of opportunity, lack of appropriate materials, etc.)	3. Unknown	3. Lack of motivation
4. "Forgetful"			3. Lack of self-esteem
			3. "Forgetful"

*Adults with four years of school or less ranked barriers the same as the total sample.

Table 5

THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION INSTRUCTIONAL

MANUAL FOR OLDER GEORGIANS

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